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ABSTRACT

This module provides readers who are not familiar with Puerto Ricans with information regarding certain Puerto Rican mores which seem outstanding to people of Anglo-Saxon background. Pre- and postassessment tests, a bibliography, learning alternative strategies, and a narrative concerning Puerto Ricans and their mores are presented. (MJM)

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MODULAR SEQUENCE:
PUERTO RICAN PUPILS
IN MAINLAND SCHOOLS

TTP 003.11 PUERTO RICANS AND THEIR MORES

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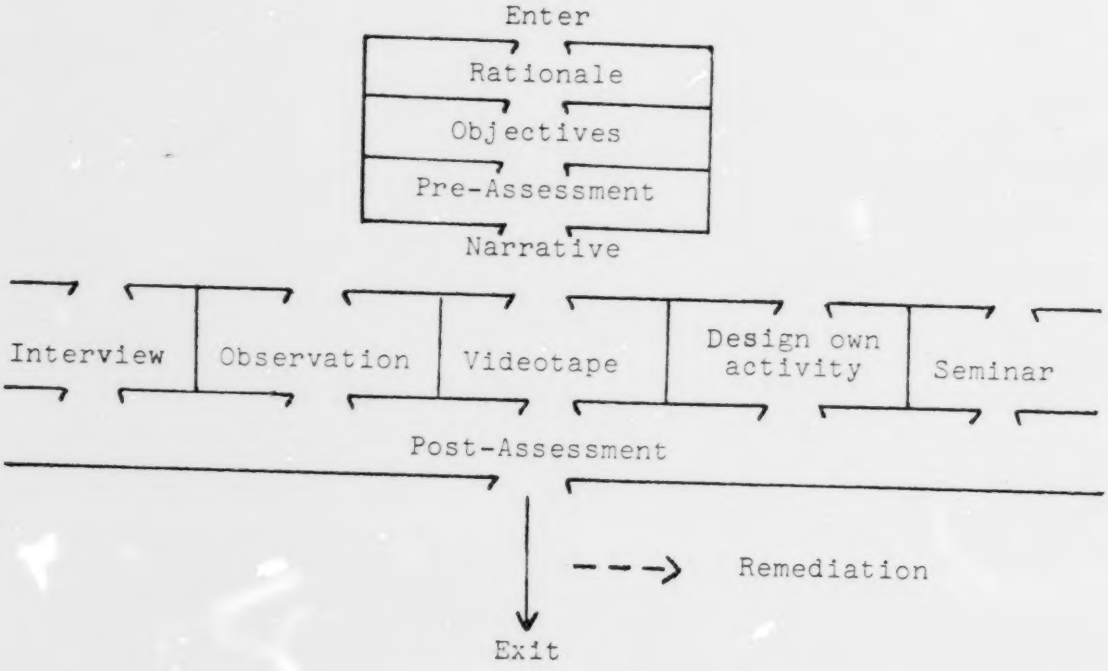
PUERTO RICANS AND THEIR MORES



RATIONALE

This module provides readers who are not familiar with Puerto Ricans with information regarding certain Puerto Rican mores which seem outstanding to people of an Anglo-Saxon background. It is hoped this module will help the reader gain a better understanding of the Puerto Rican by making the reader aware of the Puerto Rican's appreciation of the universe.

OBJECTIVES

Given a series of learning alternatives on Puerto Rican mores, the participant will be able to:

- identify mores which are sometimes misunderstood by Anglos
- explain the Puerto Rican's appreciation of the universe

PRE-ASSESSMENT

To assess your prior mastery of the terminal objectives of this unit of work, complete the following exercise. Your performance on this assessment will determine which learning tasks you are to perform.

Directions: Answer the following in short answer form.

1. What heritage do Puerto Ricans share in common with North Americans?
2. Why do some Puerto Rican mores seem odd to North Americans?
3. Why do Puerto Ricans tend to congregate outside of their homes?
4. What do Puerto Rican festivities usually include?
5. What age groups are included in Puerto Rican festivities?
6. How has Island living served to impart a strong sense of community among Puerto Ricans?
7. How has the Caribbean environment affected Puerto Ricans?
8. What institutions did Spain bring to Puerto Rico?
9. What is meant by the "Spanish conception of the universe"?
10. What is the Spanish hierarchical conception of society?
11. What factors have modified this hierarchical conception in Puerto Rico?
12. What is Puerto Rican fatalism?
13. What are the main characteristics of the Puerto Rican sense of honor?
14. Why are Puerto Ricans at times sensitive to situations which do not usually bother Anglos?
15. Give an example of how a Puerto Rican way of showing respect might be interpreted as disrespect by an Anglo?

16. What is meant by the "Puerto Rican notion of shame" or "pasar verguenza"?

17. How does a Puerto Rican relate to his family?

18. How is the principle of efficiency affected by the Puerto Rican system of personal relationships?

19. What are the responsibilities of a Puerto Rican husband?

20. What is "viernes social"?

21. What are the sexual options for men and women in Puerto Rico?

22. What is a Puerto Rican "macho"?

23. Why do Puerto Rican parents have a hard time enforcing traditional mores on their daughters in the U.S.A.?

24. What are some of the direct consequences of Puerto Rico's rapid industrial development?

25. How have industrial development and the broadening of educational opportunities affected the status of women in Puerto Rican society?

LEARNING ALTERNATIVES

I. Read: Rafael W. Ramírez de Arellano y Lynch, "Puerto Rican Mores", included in module.

II. Select one of the following:

A. Interview a classroom teacher to determine behaviors of Puerto Rican children which are sometimes misunderstood by Anglos.

B. Observe Puerto Rican children to determine the information noted in IIA.

C. Prepare a videotape illustrating Puerto Rican mores.

D. Design your own learning activity.

E. Attend a seminar as scheduled by your module coordinator.

POST-ASSESSMENT

Directions: Answer the following in short answer form.

1. What heritage do Puerto Ricans share in common with North Americans?
2. Why do some Puerto Rican mores seem odd to North Americans?
3. Why do Puerto Ricans tend to congregate outside of their homes?
4. What do Puerto Rican festivities usually include?
5. What age groups are included in Puerto Rican festivities?
6. How has Island living served to impart a strong sense of community among Puerto Ricans?
7. How has the Caribbean environment affected Puerto Ricans?
8. What institutions did Spain bring to Puerto Rico?
9. What is meant by the "Spanish conception of the universe"?
10. What is the Spanish hierarchical conception of society?
11. What factors have modified this hierarchical conception in Puerto Rico?
12. What is Puerto Rican fatalism?
13. What are the main characteristics of the Puerto Rican sense of honor?
14. Why are Puerto Ricans at times sensitive to situations which do not usually bother Anglos?
15. Give an example of how a Puerto Rican way of showing respect might be interpreted as disrespect by an Anglo?
16. What is meant by the "Puerto Rican notion of shame" or "pasar verguenza"?

17. How does a Puerto Rican relate to his family?

18. How is the principle of efficiency affected by the Puerto Rican system of personal relationships?

19. What are the responsibilities of a Puerto Rican husband?

20. What is "viernes social"?

21. What are the sexual options for men and women in Puerto Rico?

22. What is a Puerto Rican "macho"?

23. Why do Puerto Rican parents have a hard time enforcing traditional mores on their duaghters in the U.S.A.?

24. What are some of the direct consequences of Puerto Rico's rapid industrial development?

25. How have industrial development and the broadening of educational opportunities affected the status of women in Puerto Rican society?

Competency will be certified when your module coordinator has ascertained that the submitted post-assessment is of acceptable quality.

Remediation: Alternate learning activities are available on a contractual basis with the module coordinator.

POST-ASSESSMENT

1. When did most North Americans begin to notice Puerto Ricans?
2. What heritage to Puerto Ricans share in common with North American?
3. Why do some Puerto Rican mores seem odd to North Americans?
4. Why do Puerto Ricans tend to congregate outside of their homes?
5. What do Puerto Rican festivities usually include?
6. What age groups are included in Puerto Rican festivities?
7. How has Island living served to impart a strong sense of community among Puerto Ricans?
8. How has the Caribbean environment affected Puerto Ricans?
9. Who were the first Puerto Ricans?
10. When did Black people first come to Puerto Rico?
11. What institutions did Spain bring to Puerto Rcio.
12. What is meant by the "Spanish conception of the universe"?
13. What is the Spanish hierarchical conception of society?
14. What factors have modified this hierarchical conception in Puerto Rico?
15. What is Puerto Rican fatalism?
16. What are the main characteristics of the Puerto Rican sense of honor?
17. Why are Puerto Ricans at times sensitive to situations which do not usually bother Anglos?
18. Give an example of how a Puerto Rican way of showing

respect might be interpreted as disrespect by an Anglo?

19. What is meant by the "Puerto Rican notion of shame" or "pasar verguenza"?

20. How strong are family ties in Puerto Rico?

21. How does a Puerto Rican relate to his family?

22. How is the principle of efficiency affected by the Puerto Rican system of personal relationships?

23. Who is the supreme authority in a Puerto Rican family?

24. What are the responsibilities of a Puerto Rican husband?

25. What is "viernes social"?

26. What are the sexual options for men and women in Puerto Rico?

27. What is a Puerto Rican "macho"?

28. What is the role of a young girl in Puerto Rico prior to her marriage?

29. Why do Puerto Rican parents have a hard time enforcing traditional mores on their daughters in the U.S.?

30. What are some of the direct consequences of Puerto Rico's rapid industrial development?

31. How have industrial development and broadening of educational opportunities affected the status of women in Puerto Rican society?

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NARRATIVE

"Puerto Ricans and their mores"

When an attempt is made to explain the mores of a people, there is always the danger of reducing the characterization to a series of cliches or stereotypes. Yet people living in different parts of the world sharing common experiences develop traits of character and mores which, taken as a whole, form an image which reflects the way they are seen by other peoples.

The people of Puerto Rico have developed a distinct culture and a way of life which came to U.S. attention primarily in the years after World War II, when about one third of the population of the Island migrated to the North for various reasons.

Many of the habits and mores of Puerto Ricans were to seem strange to Anglos, even though Puerto Ricans share, to a great extent, a common Western heritage with other Americans. Nevertheless, what is significant to many North Americans is not what is shared in common, but rather what sets Puerto Ricans apart from their fellow citizens.

Most of what seem to North Americans as peculiar Puerto Rican ways are in fact natural ways of reacting to the tropical island environment. When these ways are transplanted to a Temperate Zone, they are out of their natural context and thus seem odd to those unfamiliar with the tropics.

One of these ways is the tendency of Puerto Ricans to

congregate outside their homes. Because of the warm weather, Puerto Ricans go outside of their homes during their free time. They congregate on the streets which, in fact, lead to plazas that are provided by all Puerto Rican towns for the express purpose of congregating in the outdoors. Yet, many Puerto Ricans get into trouble in U.S. cities with authorities who are oblivious of this Puerto Rican custom which to their eyes is loitering, a crime.

Puerto Ricans have traditionally been gregarious and hospitable folk who on occasion like to have a good time, sharing music, food and good company together. In fact, for certain festivities, Puerto Rican families may travel long distances in order to share in the merrymaking. The Puerto Rican host feels obliged to put out his best for his guest, and he has no qualms about spending money for this. Puerto Rican festivities include the usual amenities such as food and drink, but they also include a lot of dancing.

Parties also tend to include all members of the family, and parents bring along their childre, who are expected to join in the fun, too. Inversely, a child's birthday or christening may turn into a party for all age groups in which activities seem to develop along their own lines, and are hardly ever directed or organized. Actually, just about any reason may be found for celebrating, and all celebrate together. When not dancing, the men tend to

stay together in one group, while the women are apart in another group with the children running all over the place and everybody has a good time

Island living has also served to impart a strong sense of community among Puerto Ricans, who, in many ways, react towards each other as if all were members of one big family. The natural generosity of the Puerto Rican manifests itself in various ways, from the lengths a person will go to show his hospitality in the home to small acts of consideration and kindness in everyday living.[1] The natural courtesy is also extended to strangers and is not limited to any one social class in the Island.

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Puerto Ricans are the cultural product of their Caribbean environment. For almost five-hundred years the people of the Island have been subjected to different forces in their environment and have successfully absorbed the many elements that have come together to form their culture.

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1 For example, a Puerto Rican, without being asked, will provide correct change for a hapless passenger on a bus. This author was able to confirm this on many occasions during a recent trip to the Island. While on this same trip I also had the need to travel to Ponce, on the south of the Island in a publico, or small public car. When the publico stopped at a restaurant in the mountains the driver noticed that one of his passengers, an old man, did not have enough money for a meal. The driver quietly ordered and paid for a ration of the day's special for the old man, out of his own pocket. What is remarkable is the ordinary, matter of fact quality of these acts of kindness and the spontaneous and abundant way in which they occur.

The first Puerto Ricans were Taino Indians who were eventually absorbed by the Europeans who began to colonize the Island shortly after Columbus came to America. Almost together with the Europeans came the Blacks from Africa, brought against their will to work for the white men in the mines and fields. The three peoples, Europeans mostly from Spain, native Indians and Blacks of African ancestry, lived together, side by side, sharing common experiences and learning from each other throughout the centuries, up to the present time, creating Puerto Rico.

Spain gave Puerto Rico most of its present day institutions, including the Spanish language and the hierarchical social structure. Since Puerto Rico was a part of the Spanish empire for such a long time, about four hundred years, it was to participate directly in Spain's imperial plan, which meant that the new territories were to become extensions of the Mother Country, and so, consequently, they would reflect Spanish ways in general. People, religion, language, architecture, social relationships, all would be transplanted to the New World. In attempting to define Puerto Rican mores, one must give a prominent role to the Spanish character in the formation of these mores.

Foremost among the Spanish institutions which Puerto Ricans received from Spain is the Spanish conception of the universe, whereby spiritual values are of utmost importance. It is convenient to quote Joseph P. Fitzpatrick,

a keen observer of Puerto Rican mores:

> "What the Latin means is that his fundamental concerns are not with this world or its tangible features. He has a sense of spirit and soul as much more important than the body, and as being intimately related to his value as a person; he tends to think in terms of transcendent qualities, such as justice, loyalty, or love, rather than in terms of practical arrangements which spell out justice or loyalty in the concrete. On an intellectual level, he strives to clarify relationships conceptually with a confidence that, if they can be made intellectually clear and precise, the reality which they express will have those relationships. He thinks of life very much in terms of ultimate values and ultimate spiritual goals, and expresses a willingness to sacrifice material satisfactions for these." [2]

Another Spanish institution that has survived in Puerto Rico to some extent is the hierarchical conception of the society. Spain was a monarchy composed of two social classes, the hidalgos, or nobles, and the commoners or plebeyos. Under this system an individual finds fulfillment within his own social class. Social mobility is practically impossible and thus is not a problem for the individual. In Puerto Rico, the hierarchical system has broken down a lot due to industrialization, economic development and the rise of a new middle class. Yet, it still governs the way people think and regard each other to some extent, especially in the small towns.

Together with these institutions the Spaniards also gave Puerto Ricans a sense of destiny which observers of

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2 Joseph P. Fitzpatrick, Puerto Rican Americans The Meaning of Migration to the Mainland, New Jersey, 1971. pp. 91-92.

the Island's culture call fatalism or stoicism, and which Spaniards call estoicismo espanol when applied to them. Puerto Rican fatalism is often of great value, since it has enabled Puerto Ricans to endure hardship in the Island as well as abroad. Essentially, this fatalism means that when a Puerto Rican experiences failure or hardship he accepts it with dignity, knowing that what has happened "has been written" (eso estaba ya escrito) and thus came to pass.

After over seventy years of U.S. rule in Puerto Rico many changes have occured, but those basic values acquired under the four centuries of Spanish rule still persist with great vitality, especially in the rural areas.

In addition to thes Spanish ways, Puerto Ricans have developed other characteristics of their own, and among them the most outstanding is the Puerto Rican sense of honor. This personal sense of honor is the most important value for the Puerto Rican, more important than life itself, in many instances. The sense of honor gives meaning to life and it is linked to the way a Puerto Rican is considered by others. For a Puerto Rican to be respectable he must combine the values of humility (humildad), self-worthiness (verguenza) and personal dignity (dignidad). In this way, when a Puerto Rican asks: How much is that person worth? (¿Cuanto vale esa persona?) he is asking about

the person's moral and spiritual worth, not about the amount of capital the person owns. Thus, "That man is worth a lot" (Ese hombre vale muco) means that the man has a lot of honor.

Since a Puerto Rican's self-worthiness pertains directly to moral qualities and behavior, he must therefore feel that his sense of honor is being respected at all times. As a result of this, Puerto Ricans are very sensitive to situations which are of little or no concern to his Anglo counterparts. Frequently, this leads to occasions in which the Puerto Rican is confronted with situations in which his reactions are misunderstood by people in the U.S. who are not familiar with Puerto Rican values. An example of this is the attitude of Puerto Rican school children towards Physical Education or Gym classes. Many Puerto Rican children have a hard time taking Gym in U.S. schools for the simple reason that they are expected to undress and shower in the presence of others. For a Puerto Rican, to expose himself in front of others is wrong because it offends his sense of dignity. The exposure is too much of an embarrassment, and consequently, Puerto Ricans of both sexes avoid Gym in U.S. schools like a plague.

Humility (humildad), as mentioned before, has a great part to play in the Puerto Rican's system of values. As a rule, a Puerto Rican does not attract attention to himself

by bragging either of his personal traits of his possessions. Boasting is thus condemned and discouraged in the society. Humility is also tied to respect! Respect for one's parents and social superiors, such as teachers. This may be also misunderstood by Anglos and, in fact, an act of respect by a Puerto Rican can often be interpreted as disrespect by an Anglo. An example of this may be observed in certain behavior problems of Puerto Rican school children. Puerto Rican children are taught to show respect to their elders by hanging their heads in shame and avoiding eye contact when being admonished, while Anglos are taught differently. Thus, a Puerto Rican child being scolded may incur additional wrath from a teacher or school official by behaving in a way which was intended to be respectful.

The concept of honor is also tied together with the notion of shame, self-worthiness or verguenza. "Pasar verguenza" or to endure ridicule is to be avoided at all costs. This is carried over to habits of dress and other forms of public behavior. Generally speaking, Puerto Ricans feel obliged to dress well for any occasion. This means appropriate clothing which corresponds to the formality of the event. Since public shame is to be avoided, one is expected to "dress well" (vestir bien), and this goes for all members of the family, including the children. "Pasar verguenza", the sense of shame, affects behavior in school, too. It means that children in U.S. schools will avoid

expressing themselves in class for fear of being laughed at because of their "peculiar Spanish accent." Many times it also means silence when answering back to school authorities is indicated. Another consequence of this is that the Puerto Rican child in a U.S. school will tend to keep to his own people, rarely, if ever, joining non-Puerto Ricans, and thus making his social integration more difficult, and, in fact, prolonging that very same state which inhibits him because of verguenza or shame.

Puerto Ricans learn their sense of values very early in life from their families. Family ties are strong in Puerto Rico, and, in fact, the entire social structure is formed by a network of family relationships. Since family ties are important, marriage, the union of two people, is considered to actually be a union of the families of the people involved. Following Spanish tradition, the wife keeps her maiden name after marriage and just adds her husband's name to it. Her children will bear both names, hers as well as her husband's, and in this way, the joint character of the union is reiterated. The family ties remain strong throughout the lifetime of its members, and from one generation to the next. This is reinforced by the many experiences which Puerto Rican families share together, such as weddings, christenings,

birthdays, graduations and festivities like Christman and New Year's. When a member of the family dies, all share in the sorrow, and, of course, this sharing is extended to other moments of sorrow as well, such as illness in the family. It must be pointed out that the concept of family is not restricted to the immediate members, but also includes aunts, uncles, cousins, grandparents and godparents on both sides.

The Puerto Rican thus leans on his family for a great deal of support, not just physical but moral as well. In fact, the Puerto Rican is much more dependent on his family than his Anglo counterpart, and this dependency is both normal and expected. For example, in the U.S. many young people borrow money for various reasons from their parents, and both parents and children expect to pay the debts eventually, whether they be large or small. Yet, in the Puerto Rican family the parent is expected to provide, without asking for repayment, for many situations in which the Anglo would expect repayment. The parents help out the children as long as they are needed, and in turn expect the children to provide for them in their old age, and so it is not uncommon to see several generations of a family living under one roof.

The sense of family also carries over to the friends of the families, and friendship bonds, based on mutual

loyalty, love and respect, are taken seriously by all parties in the friendhsip. Amigo, "friend," like all terms of personal relationship in Puerto Rico, involves a deep sense of commitment. From this it follows that one's success is naturally shared with one's amigos, and is expected and taken for granted. Once a person acquires a position of power in any enterprise, he is expected to share his good fortune with his family and of course with his amigos. In fact, the principle of efficiency is invariably subordinated to the system of personal relationships, and this is something that tends to baffle Anglos who must do business in the Island.

Puerto Rican families are patriarchal in anture. The man is the supreme authroity in all matters and expects to be obeyed. He makes many decision without feeling he should have to consult his wife, but, in turn, he is expected to support his wife and the children, and to treat them with kindness and respect. The authority of the man is reinforced by the double standard of sexual morality. Men have more sexual options than women in Puerto Rico. Sexual activity is not discouraged for the males before marriage, and even after marriage many Puerto Rican men indulge in frivolous affairs with women, and in fact, a day of the week is set aisde for this, "viernes social" or social Friday. Women are considered "good" or "bad": are

respected, and no rules are followed for the "bad," which are considered fair game for any man.

Sexual prowess is important to the Puerto Rican male and relates directly to the way he defines himself as a man or macho. From the moment he is born a male is reminded constantly that he is expected to be a macho. He must talk like a macho, play macho games with macho toys and reject anything which may detract from this machismo. A father proudly shows off his son to his friends and says: "Mihijo es un machito" (My son is a little macho). Yet being a macho is not limited to the Don Juan aspect, to being a conqueror of women. A macho must protect the honor of the family, as any affront to any member, male or female, touches directly upon his own sense of personal dignity. A consequence of this is the cose of honor. If a Puerto Rican's honor or sense of dignity is violated by another person, the macho is expected to seek retribution for the offense. This, taken to an extreme, on occasion leads to bloodshed for reasons which may seem trivial to an Anglo, but which for a Puerto Rican may threaten his very existence. As indicated previously, a Puerto Rican's role as a macho begins in childhood and he must defend it constantly. If offended in any way by other children, he is expected to strike out and assert his maleness. In fact, any threat to his concept of honor is taken seriously

and especially where is pertains to the women in his family. Consequently, any name calling involving a male's mother is an invitation to a fight. In fact, this is so serious that Puerto Ricans avoid using the word madre (mother) in conversation and substitute mama, mami or mamita, which are softer. Tu madre...! is an insult, a challenge the macho must meet, even as a boy.

As has been noted, women hold a subordinate role to men in Puerto Rican society. Women depend on men and are expected to find personal fulfillment within the compounds of their homes. As a child, the girl leads a sheltered existence and is taught to be humble and docile. She is expected to marry, and starts to prepare herself for this occasion while still very young. Any physical activity is discouraged, including participation in sports, and her existence gravitates towards the day when she is to wed. As an adolescent, a Puerto Rican girl is chaperoned constantly because a woman is expected to be weak, and must be protected from men so she may go to the altar a virgin.

In this way Puerto Rican women have very limited opportunities to engage in the kind of pre-marital sexual experimentation which would be normal among Anglo teenagers. The taboo against pre-marital sex for women is very strong, and if pre-marital sexual activitiea are discovered by parents, the honorable options left for the family are few.

The first option is to arrange for the immediate marriage of the daughter to the male partner. In many instances, if the male partner is not willing, but is nevertheless legally able to marry, and he insists in not marrying the girl, then he is exposing himself to be murdered by a male member of the girl's family. Another alternative left to the family is to cast out the girl from the home, since she is now in fact a "mala mujer" (bad woman) who had disgraced the family. The code of conduct is expected of all single women, and thus, if a woman is widowed while young, she returns to her father's home and has to act in the same way she did before her first marriage.

In the U.S.A. Puerto Rican parents have a hard time enforcing this code of conduct on their daughters who are exposed daily to Anglo mores. Consequently, Puerto Rican girls in the U.S. tend to marry early in their teens so that they may be able to leave their parent' home which seems to them tyrannical.

As mentioned earlier in this narrative, the rapid economic development of Puerto Rico is having a great influence on many of the customs that have been outlined here. The economic development, which is a direct consequence of the rapid industrialization of the Island, has brought about the very real possibility of upward mobility within the society. With the growth of the middle class, U.S.

materialistic and other values come into clash with the traditional Puerto Rican ways, and at the present time the mores of the society are being redefined.

The effects of the economic upheaval have been particularly felt in the structure of the Puerto Rican family. Industrialization has created many new jobs for women, a fact that has helped many women to assert themselves without having to depend as much on the men. In fact, the desire for social mobility in middle class households, especially within the past twenty years, has practically forced many wives to find employment outside of the home. This is also related to the expansion of educational facilities and opportunities for women in theIsland within the same period of time, especially at the College level. Women have taken full advantage of these opportunities, a fact which may be readily appreciated by taking into account that in 1973 over half of the students attending the University of Puerto Rico in Rio Piedras were women. Thus, the College-educated girl no longer expects to be content with being a housewife, and consequently she finds employment within the ranks of the labor force and she continues her job even after marriage. Since she shares economic responsibility with the husband, she becomes more independent, and at the same time the husband shares a greater part of what would formerly have been considered duties of the wife. An example of this phenomenon

is that more and more one may observe couples, especially young couples, buying groceries together in the supermarkets. Another example is the dramatic rise in the rate of divorces in the island, a rise that closely follows the rise in Puerto Rico's rate of economic growth. This is to be expected, since women who are wage earners no longer feel they have to put up with the inevitable humiliations brought about by the double standard.

At the same time, Puerto Rican women have broadened their participation in the professions, politics and other areas of public life, and today many women hold positions of importance in Government, Education, Medicine, Religion and the Legal System of the Island. The large proportion of women Doctors of Medicine, women lawyers and judges, women university deans and professors confirm that women now participate, fully in public life, and that this is not just token participation, since women are found in above positions of responsibility in large numbers.